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An Introduction to Pacific Solutions in Hindsight

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We are pleased to present what we believe is an excellent collection of articles conceived and developed around the theme of “Pacific Solutions”, a conference organised by the Centre for Australian Studies at the University of Barcelona (ASC) and The Centre for Peace and Social Justice at Southern Cross University (CPSJ), celebrated at the University of Barcelona in December 2011. Their yearly meetings have acquired and are characterized by a plural nature. The inter- and trans-disciplinary philosophy of both Centres enables ways to create new forms of knowledge and, therefore, innovative and potentially empowering articulations of culture(s). We agree with Eleanor Wildburger in this collection when she claims the necessity “to move in cognitive processes beyond existing boundaries,” and also with her considerations that

[a]lthough there are, of course, accepted bodies of knowledge, it is important to clarify that meaning is constructed, rather than found; in addition, meaning is culturally mediated and transformed by different domains. Researchers are challenged by the ongoing tension between established codes of (re)cognition and new (bodies of) knowledge. (Wildburger 2013: 206)

In the CEA-CPSJ conferences, therefore, all types of approaches to a suggested topic are welcome, a politics which results in an impressive richness and variety of papers, itself resulting in an astonishing wealth of discussion and, especially, learning.

The theme chosen for the 2011 conference was “Pacific Solutions.” The primary objective of the event was to exchange and share research by European and Australian teams in the field of Australian Studies, especially from a Postcolonial and Cultural Studies perspective, although theme-related contributions from outside these defining parameters were also accepted so as to cater for academic plurality. The theme Pacific Solutions read broadly as both pacific solutions and solutions from the Pacific area to the cultural, socioeconomic and environmental problems that affect our world. The latter also called for critical thinking along with political engagement, and so the theme also harked back to, and took issue with, former PM John Howard’s ‘Pacific Solution’ of offshore confinement for undesired immigration to Australian territory—a painful reminder of the former, ignominious White Australia Policy. The range of interpretations of the catch phrase Pacific Solutions thus aimed to group together a variety of related lines of engaged research, and so emphasised the inevitable interdisciplinarity of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies with other fields of research.

So while at a literal level the “Pacific Solution” is a wealthy source of thought and deliberation, metaphorically, the “trending topic”—whose acronym, you will note, coincides

with that of Postcolonial Studies—lent itself to a wide range of scholarly outlets within the field of Postcolonial Studies and, more broadly, Cultural Studies. The articles compiled here are developments of the papers presented at that forum, often expanded after threads suggested in the discussions which followed the sessions—when the time constraints customary in conferences were not too pressing. All the papers are connected to the topic areas of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies either directly or indirectly, as it will become apparent to the reader. Cultural and Postcolonial Studies are understood in a very open way, and considered as, to quote Bill Ashcroft, “a centrifugal force” which can take us to places with unsuspected horizons.¹

Many of the papers deal with literature, and all, in one way or another, with culture for that matter. As Herrero, quoting Ana Aharoni, puts it beautifully in her paper,

Literature, and culture by extension, is a powerful constituent and vehicle at the core of possible transformations, given that it mediates and transfers ideas, values and intellectual refinement between generations and between civilizations. Culture is, therefore, both a preserving and a transforming force. As Ada Aharoni stated: “Culture is a key factor in promoting genuine peace” (Herrero 2013: 114).

Although various intra- and inter-disciplinary links can be established among the articles, grouping them together in different topic areas would be arbitrary and counterproductive to the aim for interdisciplinarity in the Social Sciences and Humanities the ASC and CPSJ mean to imprint upon their joint output. Most articles defy clear disciplinary boundaries and establish multiple links with each other. In the following, the editors therefore comment on the articles in alphabetical order, highlighting connections and common ground where they think fit.

In “New Possibilities of Neighbouring: Tim Winton’s *Cloudstreet*,” **Bárbara Arizti** analyzes the figure of the neighbour in this particular novel in the light of Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of alterity and Kenneth Reinhard’s political theology, for both of whom the neighbour is somebody who should be loved in Christian terms, and not, as it often happens in our world, ignored, diminished or even mistreated. The article provides a careful and theoretically sound reading in which *Cloudstreet*’s ideology appears to have, as Arizti concludes, “consequences for both the notion of the individual and the idea of the nation, since it discloses an appetite for a more inclusive and at the same time more respectful approach to alterity.” Thus, in its metaphorical approximation to a post-Second World War neighbourhood, this fiction encourages the construction of a more empathetic and encompassing, and therefore, more fair, version of contemporary Australia.

Probably, the most literal approach to the idea of Pacific Solutions the collection includes we find in “The Malvinas/Falklands War (1982): Pacific Solutions for an Atlantic Conflict,” although unfortunately this type of solution was not achieved in the particular conflict under inspection here. In her article, **Andrea Roxana Bellot** offers a detailed description of the armed confrontation which exploded at the beginning of the 1980s between the United Kingdom and Argentina, over a territory with an undeniable strategic value in terms of potential global trouble but which was turned, at the time, into a site of symbolic power, specifically in terms of the British lost Empire and this nation’s decline as an international leading power. Bellot’s article explains why soft politics failed repeatedly and why conflict resolution strategies did not apply before the use of raw force. Bellot’s article may be read against Bill Phillip’s contribution on violence.

In “Current issues in environmental management in Australia – what do people think?” **Bill Boyd** and co-signers **Kristin den Exter**, **Les Christidis** and **David Lloyd** investigate the Australian case regarding the International Council for Science (ICSU) and International Social Science Council (ISSC) 2010 report, a publication which sought to mobilise researchers in a 10-year scientific effort to address what these two organisations define as the “grand challenges in global sustainability”. Addressing the Australian case, Boyd e.a. found that “specific responses” to environmental management “were context and scale-dependent, [and] highlight[-] the inherent tensions between maintaining production and consumption, and protection of resources and ecosystem services.” **David Lloyd** provides a detailed case study, co-signed by **Bill Boyd** and **Hannabeth Luke**, to illustrate these findings. “Community perspectives of natural resource extraction: coal-seam gas mining and social identity in Eastern Australia” analyses community reaction to proposed coal-seam gas mining in eastern Australia. Their study highlights the importance of scale and context in environmental management, the difficulties in making economic and environmental concerns match, as well as the importance of community views in issues of natural resource use, even if the debate in question has a strong national component. Boyd e.a.’s two, well-documented articles illustrate in conjunction how pacific solutions for environmental-economic tension may only obtain when scholarly knowledge transfer and policy-making are geared towards, and respect the local community level of environmental and economic impact.

In her original contribution, entitled “Connections and Integration: Oral Traditions/Quantum Paradigm,” **Dolors Collellmir** recuperates the organic link between science and art which was common in the past and which got lost to a great extent with the advent of modernity. Collellmir, who signals that her paper is part of a recent trend following the same direction, argues that often artists have made findings that only later on have been incorporated to scientific discourse as “discoveries.” Part of wider research which has resulted in the book-length work *El corazón matemático de la literatura*,ⁱⁱ this paper reads two novels from the Pacific area, *Potiki* and *Benang*, to show how they illustrate some aspects of quantum mechanics, in particular the key principle of quantum entanglement, or non-locality. Collellmir concludes that this type of “knowledge”, relatively new to the West, has always been present, in different ways, in aboriginal cultures in different parts of the world, a statement which opens a whole new set of possibilities for reading those cultures. Collellmir’s article forms part of a whole set of contributions on literature from various angles, including Arizti, Ellis, Herrero, Renes, Rønning, Phillips, and if one considers the narrative structure of cinema, Jones.

Japanese poetry written in the period of colonial expansion of the Japanese nation is the subject matter explored by **Toshiko Ellis** in her work “The Invisible Other and Symptomatic Silences: Japanese Poetic Visions of the Colonial Pacific in the 1920s.” Through the analysis of several poems written by a group of Japanese poets living in the port-city of Dalian, in continental territory which had been gained to the Russians in the Russo-Japanese war, Ellis concludes that the imperial gaze of these poets, representative of the nation, was still in formation in this period. However, historians have observed a conscious attempt in the period to build a colonialist identity modelled on Western models, which Ellis traces in the suggestive medium of poetry. The article shows how the vision of the Dalian poets contrasts with that of another writer, Kaneko Mitsuharu, whose poems about the places he visited around the Pacific Ocean were, by contrast, informed by a desire to know the Other and to *learn*, rather than to *possess*.

In “Creating inter-cultural spaces for co-learning”, **Kristina Everett and Eloise Hummell** propose a pacific solution to the under-representation of Indigenous students in Higher Education as a result of what they signal as the “attendant lower social indicators than those of the wider Australian society,” which have turned into such a serious, long-standing concern for Australian government and human rights advocates. Although the 2007 UNESCO guidelines on inter-cultural education are inclusive and non-assimilationist, few effective classroom models have been developed from them. Everett and Hummell look at the so-called ‘Daruganora’ program in the area of Sydney as an example of the intercultural classroom as a space of joint analysis and dialogue surrounding self-representation of Indigenous peoples by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers. Indigenous students lead the dialogue with non-Indigenous classmates and teachers to co-create a new, inter-cultural representation through the setting up of an Indigenous art exhibition. Everett and Hummell defend that this model may be instrumental in opening up spaces of “open, honest and respectful interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people relating to Indigenous representations of identity.”

“Pacific Solutions for the Environment: A Personal Journey” is **David Fulton**’s personal account of his career as a documentary filmmaker. In plain, accessible language, Fulton describes how his sense of responsibility for the natural environment and its interplay with human presence are part and parcel of a personal and professional commitment. His is a story of personal involvement, and therefore an “emotional journey” into a peaceful solution for the meeting of man and nature that denounces the devastating impact of the capitalist production system on our lives and natural environment. As he concludes himself: “This has been part of my own personal search for pacific horizons in the environment we all share.” Fulton’s contribution may be read against Boyd e.a.’s articles on environmental concerns, as well as Llauradó’s exposé on industrial agriculture.

Lucy Frost’s “Protecting the Children: Early Years of the King’s Orphan Schools in Van Diemen’s Land” contests recent Australian government policy towards asylum-seeking children, and places the public outrage against official refugee treatment in a historical perspective that aims to contribute to a truly pacific solution to the debate. Her point of departure is the policy followed 200 years ago by George Arthur, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen’s Land, the present-day Tasmania. Frost shows in her well-documented analysis, spiced with case studies, how the government’s first objective was to deal with socially-vulnerable children humanely and responsibly. As she suggests at the end of her paper, “In these days when we continue to confine children behind high fences, refugee children in detention centres and bewildered Indonesian boys in our gaols, we might do well to remember that even in the fledgling penal colony of Van Diemen’s Land, there was once another model for the care of children, a model based squarely on a commitment to protect.” : Frost’s historical review chimes in with Renes’s article on Indigenous-Australian writing and the Stolen Generations, and can also be read against Phillips’ contribution on violence.

In “Merlinda Bobis’s *The Solemn Lantern Maker*: The Ethics of Traumatic Cross-Cultural Encounters,” **Dolores Herrero** offers a seductive and thought-provoking reading of Merlinda Bobis’ novel, grounded on relevant elaborations of trauma theory but drawing as well on moving reflections about the important value of literature and culture—of which we ourselves disposed above. Bobis’s novel, as Herrero’s reading underscores, links personal with global politics, showing how one impinges on the other. The difficult lives of several characters set in contemporary Manila are seen to be immersed in the maelstrom of developments of a world which, after 9/11, is affected by terror and mistrust of the Other. In a nutshell, Herrero reads their story as Merlinda Bobis’s suggestion that we see the world beyond harmful dichotomies.

Andrew Jones's "It's Not [Just] Cricket: The Art and Politics of the Popular – Cultural Imperialism, 'Sly Civility' & Postcolonial Incorporation" makes an amazing contribution to several areas: Postcolonial Studies and Cultural Studies at large, but, more particularly, the study and story of cricket, the analysis of contemporary and colonial identities, the criticism(s) of contemporary Australian policies, and the nuanced power (dis)equilibriums and (re)presentations of the colonial scene. Appealingly framed in cricket language, Jones's analysis of the acclaimed film *Lagaan* is a truly cross-disciplinary exercise in wise criticism, ambitious and full of eye-opening suggestions. His analysis of the film focuses on the charismatic character of Bhuvan, *Lagaan's* protagonist, and on Elizabeth, Bhuvan's antagonist/counterpart in a romantic and colonial sense. Yet somehow Jones's disquisition spans more than merely these characters and topics.

Francesc Llauradó i Duran's graphic representation on the role of bio-agriculture, "The target is food for all: what's new in agriculture? A pacific army of farmers," looks at environmental problems in relation to meeting current and future global food necessities from the point of agricultural production. His is an industrial view in tune with environmental concerns, and aims to show how an environmentally-friendly application of bio-chemical treatment of culture land can prevent a catastrophe caused by the world's steadily-growing population, not least armed conflict over limited resources of first-need goods.

In "The Decline of Violence is Surely a Good Thing", **Bill Phillips** discusses Steven Pinker's 2011 volume *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, which argues against the common belief that the world is becoming increasingly violent. Tracing the history of humanity from its origins to the present day, Pinker shows how strong, stable government is the principal reason for the decline of violence. Pinker briefly addresses how literature has influenced the reduction of violence through the transmission of empathy, and so serves pacific purposes. Phillips expands on Pinker's assertion on literature and gives a wealth of examples from texts from different periods to support the latter's thesis. Phillips concludes that "Pinker is clear throughout *The Better Angels of our Nature*, that Hobbes's vision was always contentious - that deferring to a strong and stable government must always be accompanied by the struggle to avoid tyranny. It is difficult not to sympathise with Pinker who, after all, has statistics on his side. The world has become less violent and has achieved this, above all, through submission to those in power."

In "Kim Scott's Fiction within Western Australian Life-Writing: Voicing the Violence of Removal and Displacement," **Martin Renes** looks at vulnerable child removal in Australia through the optics of the Stolen Generations and Indigenous-Australian life-writing. The victims of forced separation and migration, they have suffered serious trans-generational problems of adaptation and alienation in Australian society, which have been not only documented from the outside in official reports but also reflected in Indigenous-Australian literature over the last three decades. Renes gives a short overview of some West-Australian Indigenous authors, but particularly deals with the semi-biographical fiction by the Nyoongar author Kim Scott, which shows how a very liminal hybrid identity can be firmly written in place yet. According to Renes, Scott's oeuvre advocates for pacific ways of co-existence by "un-writing past policies of physical and 'epistemic' violence on the Indigenous Australian population, [...and...] approaching Australianess from an Indigenous perspective as inclusive, embracing transculturality within the nation-space."

An effective unravelling of the "strange contrapuntal relationship between identity, history, and nation" in the Pacific Area, as she herself puts its quoting Bill Ashcroft, is what **Anne**

Holden Rønning offers in “Mismatching Perspectives and Pacific Transculturality.” This unravelling is, to begin with, grounded on an effective revision of the contiguous yet different concepts of transculturation, transculturality and transliteracy, “border crossing” and “contact zone,” together with others, and then carried out through paying close attention to the notion of perspective. In the article, Rønning makes major use of writings by Alan Duff and Ania Walwicz to illustrate her contention that transculturality is a major marker of the Pacific region’s idiosyncrasy, but she also incorporates allusions to a myriad other cultural products from the area. The British-Norwegian scholar explores a rich network of connections and proximities, and also, as her title advances, of mismatchings in different ways, eventually prompting a pertinent question, namely, “whether looking at literature from a transcultural perspective also expresses a resistance to the project of global modernization.”

Eleanor Wildburger explores in *Indigenous Australian art in practice and theory* issues connected to the Ngurrara canvas, the famous Aboriginal Australian cultural object which is both an art work and a legal document. In this connection, she refers to the need for non-aboriginal art and culture critics and pedagogues to transgress the epistemological and aesthetic boundaries of their immediate culture in their exploration of different weltanschauungen and forms of expression. In recognizing the experience of art as a means to learn about otherness and to expand our worldview, Wildburger suggests that Western museums, whose pedagogical function is undeniable, should be more careful in the presentation of exhibitions about Australian Aboriginal art. The cultural contexts in which objects are made possible and produced should be as relevant for museum curators as the very aesthetic features of the exhibits, something that, in Wildburger’s analysis, fails to happen most of the time. Collections are often presented in European museums, Wildburger argues, as disconnected from their cultural reality and from among themselves. The critic has coined the term “cultural design” (2010) to refer to these connections, which could be understood as the DNA of Aboriginal artworks. European audiences, Wildburger claims, should not be deprived of the “cultural design” of Aboriginal artworks, in order to be able to truly acknowledge and celebrate cultural difference. Wildburger’s concern with Indigenous-Australian cultural expression can be read against Everett and Hummell’s essay.

This Coolabah issue rounds off with **Bill Phillips’** review of *Error*, a volume of verse written by the Australian poet Elizabeth Campbell.

We hope that *Pacific Solutions in Hindsight* offers multiple perspectives on facing and improving our joint future.

This volume is kindly dedicated to Susan Ballyn and Kathleen Firth, for their many years of generous dedication to Postcolonial and Cultural Studies, in Spain and abroad.

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Barcelona, January 2013

ⁱ Bill Ashcroft, "Introduction: A Convivial Democracy." In Bill Ashcroft et al., ed. *Literature for Our Times: Postcolonial Studies in the Twenty First Century*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012. p. xvii.

ⁱⁱ Dolores Collellmir, *El corazón matemático de la literatura*. Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2011.